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ABSTRACT

Three areas of concern relative to Tongan Americans' acculturation to the United States are the focus of this paper. First, Tongan Americans believe that a high school education is sufficient. Although Tongan families come to the United States in the name of education, once they are here their objectives change. Seeing that high school graduates can earn more money doing such jobs as yard services and tree trimming than can college graduates, Tongan parents reason that a college education is irrelevant. Also, immediate material achievement receives a higher priority than academic achievement. In the United States today, however, such a view is short-sighted. In the information age we are entering, those without sufficient education will be disenfranchised both from material rewards and from full participation in national life. Second, Tongan Americans think that fluency in Tongan is obsolete and that fluency in English is synonymous with academic achievement. The latter, however, is a false assumption, and keeping in touch with one's roots through maintenance of the native tongue enhances both one's self-concept and one's fluency in English. Third, Tongan Americans, in face of all the studies decrying the influence of television on children, see television as a good surrogate parent. The author's experience in bringing up his own children without television confirmed to his satisfaction that life without television is better for the family as a unit and for its individual members. (CMG)

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PACIFIC ISLANDERS' CONCERNS: THE TONGAN FAMILY IN TRANSITION

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The United States government, during the Eisenhower administration, authorized a quota of 100 immigrants per year for Tonga. Thus, the first Tongans to immigrate to the United States of America left Tonga in January of 1956 and made their home in Salt Lake City, Utah.¹ The next major group to leave for the US came in 1957 for Hawaii as students when The Church College of Hawaii (now BYU-Hawaii Campus) opened as an institution of higher learning. Then more students (both as non-immigrants & immigrants) followed in the subsequent years. Soon there were Tongan American citizens who now can file petitions for their relatives. In this way the Tongan population in the US steadily increased and began to form little concentrations in Honolulu and Laie, Hawaii; Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; Salt Lake City, Utah. Later, more Tongan communities began to grow in Pomona, San Diego, Sacramento, California; Phoenix, Arizona; Provo and Spanish Fork, Utah; Reno, Nevada; Dallas, Texas; and Waipahu, Hawaii.

The number of Tongan Americans in the US is many when compared to the 100,000 plus population of the Tonga Islands, but very few when compared to other US minority groups such as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and Korean, to mention only a few. Nevertheless, the number of Tongan immigrants is large enough and critical to warrant registration of several concerns regarding their status quo. These areas of concern were identified as a result of the writer's visits to specific Tongan communities in Hawaii, California, and Utah. During these visits the writer had opportunities to lecture, interact, interview many Tongans and observe both individuals and families in natural settings.

This paper is focused on three areas of concern relative to the Tongan Americans' search to acculturate to the expectations, standards, and values of their adopted society, the United States of America. These areas are thus

stated: 1. The Tongan American says: High School Education is Sufficient. Stated in question form: What is the value of an education beyond high school? 2. The Tongan American says: Fluency in the Native Language in the US is Obsolete. Stated in question form: Is it useful to teach Tongan children raised in the US to be fluent in their native language? 3. The Tongan American says: Television is a good surrogate parent. Stated in question form: Is it possible to raise "normal" (effective, productive, creative, etc.) children in this information age without a television at home?

Reason for Being Concerned

The report by the Commission on Education, "A Nation at Risk," stated that:

Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce...Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the "information age" we are entering.

Our concern, however, goes beyond matters such as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society. The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life.²

The implication of this for the Tongan American is simple and clear. The time is past and gone when his survival and destiny are assured simply by an abundance of natural resources and his inexhaustible enthusiasm. Thus, his mere strength of will and determination to accomplish as expressed in the Tongan motto, "Tonga Mo'unga Ki he Loto" (The mountain of a Tongan is in his heart), without the ability for rational and enlightened thinking, will not suffice to bring about the realization of the promise first made on this country of the United States of America:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself.³

Furthermore, the following alarming findings about the achievement of children⁴ would undoubtedly raise some serious questions in the minds of concerned parents and/or citizens, regardless of ethnic origin.

- About 23 million Americans are functionally illiterate according to simple tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
- Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent.
- Two-thirds (70%) of high school seniors report doing less than one hour of homework per night.

Additionally, an analysis of comparisons across cultures by H. W. Stevenson⁵

(refer to Figure 1: Time Spent in the Classroom) revealed the following:

- American teachers devote much more time to managing student behavior than to instructing academic subjects. Chinese and Japanese teachers spend less time as task managers; they provided much more instructional time on mathematics.
- Homework is routinely given to children in Japan and Taiwan over school vacations but this practice is relatively infrequent in the US.
- Chinese and Japanese mothers may encourage their children to work harder because they view effort more than ability to be critical for academic success.

This cross-national study revealed, in essence, that American school children do not achieve the same average levels of academic skills as children in Taiwan and Japan. General intelligence was not the factor responsible for the differences in achievement. Rather, it was the effective use of instructional time accompanied by the higher expectations and greater demands of teachers and parents. These findings lend support to the notion that academic achievement is "99% perspiration and 1% inspiration." But the moral of this for the Tongan

Time spent in the classroom by children of three different countries on various subjects in grades 1 and 5. U.S. children spend more time studying language and less time studying math than children from other countries.

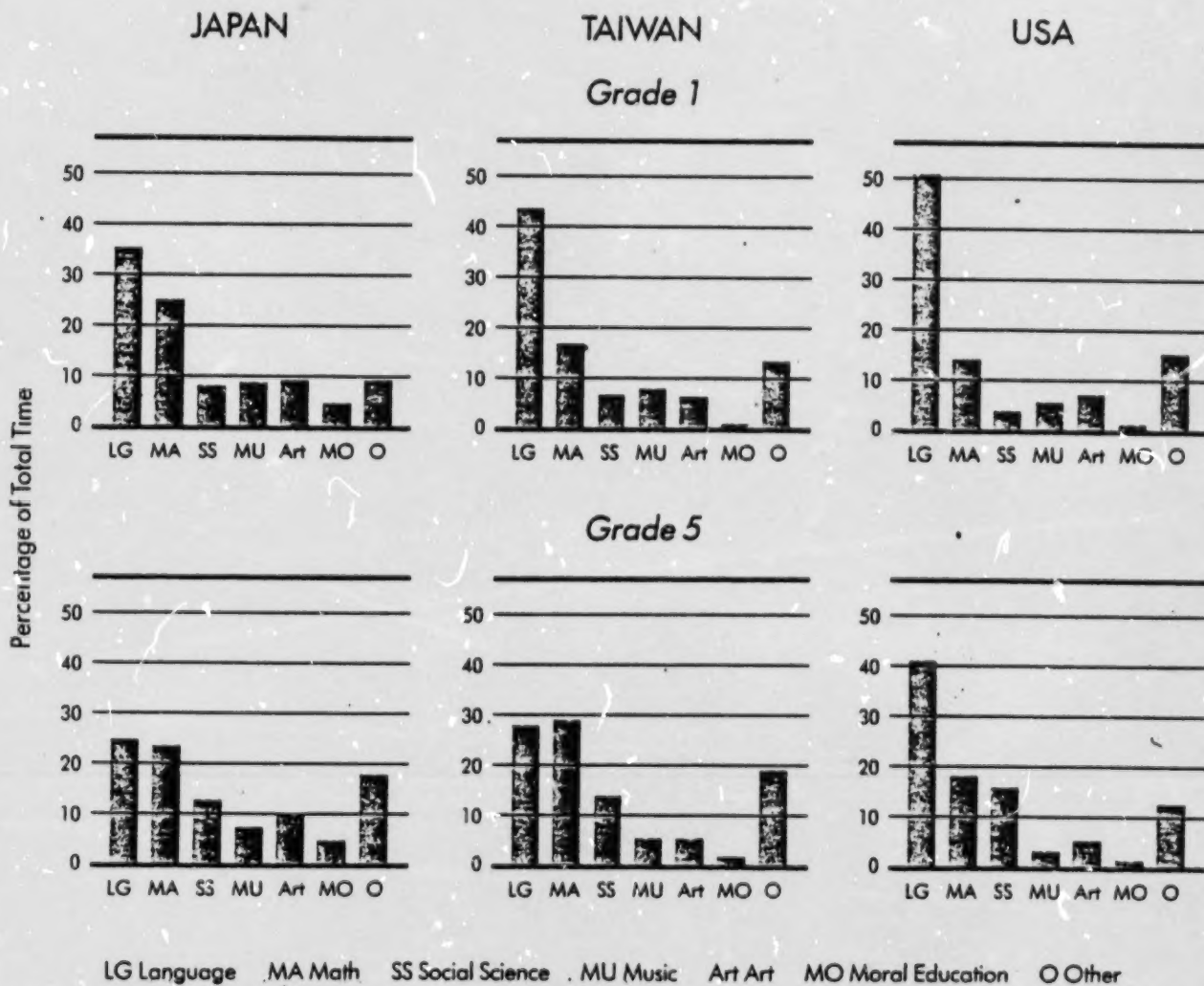


Figure 1

Source: Psychology Update, Spring 1984

American is that if the average American student falls below acceptable academic standards when compared to the Japanese and Chinese, then the picture is even more gloomy for the Tongan American.

A more elaborate discussion can be pursued further of reasons why grave concern is registered regarding the Tongan American family in the US, but the writer believes enough have been said to disclose the predicament of the Tongan American in such a manner that something can be done about it by the responsible authorities and/or agencies.

General Assumptions

The discussion of the previously stated areas of concern regarding the Tongan American which follows hereafter is based on the following general assumptions.

1. No success can compensate for failure in the home.⁶
2. Children are our country's most precious and important natural resource.⁷
3. Gaining an education beyond high school greatly increases one's sense of agency as a contributing member of his society. This education serves well as a passport to the "land of opportunity."
4. Fluency in one's native language enhances the development of a healthy self-concept and also his fluency in the English language.
5. Television in the home is a "want" not a NEED.
6. The power of the family to shape, mold, and change lives for the better is unlimited.
7. The family is the child's most influential learning environment.⁸
The family is the seedbed for the development of life-time skills, habits, and attitudes toward work, life-long learning, and independence.

In this discussion the areas of concern are referred to as Dilemma I, II, III to simplify matters. Also, the decision to use the term "dilemma" was meant to convey the availability of a choice when the Tongan American confronts or is subjected to the dilemma under discussion.

Dilemma I: The Tongan American says: A High School Education is Sufficient.

The Tongan family immigrated to the United States in the name of education, hoping to give the children quality education. But once in the US, diversions and the realities (rent, bills, food prices) of daily living stand in the way of getting an education, especially a post high school education.

With the enticement of immediate return through earning minimum wages by high school graduates in the labor market, Tongan parents, even though still committed, put a low priority on college education. This notion is further reinforced by the fact that the children (high school graduates) can now help the parents (adults) do yard services, tree trimming, stonewall contracting, and odd-end jobs, which bring home more money than college graduates can do with their degrees. Thus, the Tongan American reasons that a college education is irrelevant. Such a comparison and lack of foresight is unfortunate, very misleading, and detrimental to the potential Tongan American graduate. He must be encouraged to develop a sense of vision of what he has the potential to become, and then convert his obstacles into challenges and opportunities.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that material achievements, such as home ownership, owning and driving a new car, or the accumulation of money (wealth), receive higher priority than academic achievement. This desire to get more material possessions may be rationalized as a way of fulfilling one's obligations to the family and the elders, since the Tongan culture encourages a caring and helping attitude, especially to the elders. But this is a

paradox. It is ironical because the traditional virtue of taking good care of members of the family directly conflicts with the pursuit of personal achievements in the American way of living.

Dr. Eric Shumway, a noted authority on Tongan culture, in his presentation on "Our Tongan Immigrants: A Cultural Profile,"⁹ said this regarding gaining a post high school education:

Of course, [Tongan] parents must insist that their children value an education beyond high school. Parents who change their educational objective because a child out of high school can earn minimum wages are exceedingly unwise.

The decision to forego a post high school education in favor of simply a high school education is like a farmer who chooses to cultivate poor soil because it is conveniently close, as expressed by the Tongan proverb, "Kakā tu'u ofi" (Barren soil close by).

Dr. Shumway in October 1982¹⁰ reiterated the implicit significance of an education beyond high school when he said:

Tonga today needs more than just basic literacy. The forces at work in the South Pacific and the world, social, economic, political and cultural, are so complex and urgent that the finest kind of educated minds are required, not just to guide Tonga through "transitions," but to make sure that we retain the fundamental good upon which education in Tonga was first established.

It has been long overdue that the Tongan American learns from the similar experiences of other minority groups. It will be a waste of human resources to try and re-invent the wheel. For example, Hank Aaron, the baseball home-run King of the 1970s, offered encouragement to everyone, but especially to the black kid, when he said: "To you kids I say, Go ahead and get an education, and remember no matter how high the mountain, any of us, black or white [or brown], can climb the highest mountain." Many blacks, therefore, have literally climbed some of the highest mountains in the areas of politics, education, sports, health, and so on.

Finally, the implied meaning inherent in the Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime," is worthy of serious consideration here. It is apparent by implication that the ultimate aim is to "teach the Tongan American how to fish." This is the equivalent of obtaining an education beyond high school, especially a college education. "Giving a Tongan American a fish" is not bad, but why settle for a fish when there is also the opportunity to obtain much more through one's own effort.

Dilemma II: The Tongan American says: Fluency in the native language in the USA is obsolete.

There is a quiet debate among Tongan Americans in the major concentrations in Hawaii, California, Utah, Arizona, and Nevada about the relevancy of being fluent speakers of the Tongan language in an environment where the dominant language is English.

The majority of the Tongans believe it is not necessary to teach their children to be fluent in the Tongan language. The parents are proud to hear their sons/daughters speak English fluently. Therefore, they either ignore or discourage their children from using Tongan as a medium of learning. It is, therefore, unfortunate that most Tongans believe that fluency in English is synonymous with academic achievement. For example, when the writer was invited to offer a public prayer in 1975 before the studentbody, after graduating with his Ph.D., feedback was received afterward on how those Tongans present in the public meeting felt uncomfortable before the prayer because they were not certain whether the writer could articulate well in English to match their expectation of a Tongan with a Ph.D. degree. At any rate, the message is that fluency in English is an indicator of being learned.

Historically, the Tongan children were punished in the high schools in

Tonga for speaking Tongan. This was the practice in order to have them speak English a lot more and be fluent English speakers. It was ^{not} intended for Tongans to hate the Tongan language. However, the subtle message was transmitted through associative learning that English was better and superior to the Tongan language. As a consequence, Tongan parents took it as their cue that their children are learning a great deal when they speak in English fluently. In actuality, this was far from the truth. Mere English fluency is no reliable indicator of academic achievement. In fact, parents are being deceived when they use English fluency as their indicator of high academic achievement.

It is sad for Tongan parents and the elderly who cannot communicate with children or others because of language barriers. The adults resent the reversal of roles (the youth now interpret the American culture to the elders) and the fact that their circle of friends in the US is limited. Thus, they are socially isolated from their peers or associates.

Dr. Shumway, Academic Vice President of BYU-Hawaii Campus, admonished Tongan families to keep their own language while learning English. Furthermore, he said that "there are two lasting gifts we can give our children--one is roots, the other is wings. Fluency in Tongan will help him keep his roots while English will give him wings."¹¹ Thus, the psychological impact of one's keeping in touch with his roots is the enhancement of his self-concept and personal identity.

Senator Abercrombie,¹² in agreement with and lending support to Dr. Shumway's admonition, reminds the indifferent Tongan American by saying:

Familiarity with English has not served to lessen allegiance to Tongan ways but rather is an added dimension in Tongan life. Coupled with the Tongan penchant for working together, these factors can be the basis for young Tongans to live in both the world of their forebears and present-day landscape of industrial technology without losing sight of their values.

Dilemma III: The Tongan American says: Television is a good surrogate parent.

It was after the birth of the writer's second daughter Lupe in 1974 that the writer (Funaki) and his wife Malia made a simple and yet profound decision to raise their children without a television set at home. It was a challenge to see if the family (parents) could do a better job in rearing children than the television.

Looking back now and evaluating the consequences of a choice made 9 years ago, the writer and his wife are more determined than ever to continue raising their family without television. They are convinced that they made one of the wisest choices and perhaps the greatest in their lives. The timing was perfect. And the sacrifice was well worth it. By token of sacrifice the writer gave up watching his sports programs (football, basketball, baseball, tennis, boxing, etc.) and his wife gave up her programs of "As The World Turns," "General Hospital," "The Young & Restless", etc.

The loss to the Funaki family, if one is tempted to reason so, is like the analogy of a wooden box of personal belongings being lost in the process of moving from one home (house) to another. The owner is aware that he has lost something and vaguely remembers it only when others ask him about it. But in reality he discovers that his life as well as the lives of those who depend upon him go on without interruption and, interestingly enough, in many productive ways.

The birth of the idea to raise the writer's family without TV took place in December 1973 in Pomona, California. The writer and his family were on their way to BYU, Provo from Tonga to complete his doctorate degree. He had been teaching in Tonga for four years. The stop in Pomona with relatives was for Christmas.

The writer, being so excited about watching TV since it had been 4 years

without TV, sat and watched TV day and night for two days. Toward the end of the second day the writer became afraid and concerned that violence in the streets of the big cities in the United States appeared so real that he felt unsafe to walk down the streets in California. Of course, the writer became rational again after being away from the tube, but the impressions about the possible ill-effects of TV were so real and powerful that they directly influence the decision of the writer and his wife to raise a family without the help of television.

Preschool children are the single largest television audience in America, spending a greater number of total hours and a greater proportion of their waking day watching television than any other group. Look at the following statistics of television exposure:¹³

- Television is in over 95% of all American homes (Brightly, 1976, p.137).
- By the time children reach the age of 5 they have watched TV for as many hours as it takes to earn a B.A. degree (Cohen, 1974, p.7).
- By age 6 many children have been exposed to 3000 to 4000 hours of TV (Chambers and Chamberline, 1976, p. 53).

The author of the Research Report, "Television: A Dilemma for Parents," summarizes that "many critics feel that whatever the entertainment or educational benefits of TV, they may be purchased at too high a price, and they cite three major problems: the effects of commercials; the content of the program; and the time that could be better spent."¹⁴ There is a growing group of experts who are "concerned that even the best television does more harm than good because it robs children of play time, making them less creative, less verbal, less social, less independent." (Singer and Singer, 1977)¹⁵ In support of the above conclusion the following is quoted from a summary of an experiment with certain families in Denver, Colorado.¹⁶

The parents of these families reported that their children played and read more, that siblings fought less, that family activities became more common, that mealtimes were longer, and bedtimes were earlier (Winn, 77)

This study, though provocative, was not a carefully controlled, scientific experiment. However, a controlled scientific experiment on the effects of television is almost impossible, because families that do not have television are so rare...Studies have shown that children who watch a lot of television tend to be lower achievers than children who watch a little (Stein and Friedrich, 1975; Gadverry, 1980).

One reason for the inverse relationship (correlation) between achievement and the amount of time spent TV viewing is the fact that language skills cannot be mastered in the early years without individualized communication between adult and child.

What will now follow in this section will be a summary of the results and findings of the Funaki family experience without television for 9 years. A 10-minute video presentation titled "Dr. Funaki and Family--Views on Television" has been prepared on VHS format by Dennis Lisonbee of the BYU-Hawaii Campus Television Studio to supplement this written report.

Summary of Findings & Generalizations.

The following findings were noted and/or determined by taking actual academic performance in school as shown by teachers' evaluation and report cards. Furthermore, other indicators of positive results were identified by the frequency of occurrence of such target behaviors. Others were evaluated on the basis of participation and final production, and the recognition derived from such participation. It would be appropriate to indicate here that the whole secret to the absence of television lies in the plentiful of TIME available to be spent wisely and by choice.

1. Marked increases in school grades for everyone are evident in quarterly report cards.
2. The love for books and reading increases for everyone. The young ones' (ages 2, 1) interest in books and reading is remarkable.
3. There is plenty of time for children to play at home and in the neighborhood.

4. The young ones are more verbal and social. Everyone in the family possesses a happy disposition all the time.

5. The children become creative, especially Lupe. She is placed in the Gifted & Talented program at school. She competes favorably with her classmates who are 1 or 2 years older than her.

6. The family is able to do many activities together such as singing, family discussions, service projects, picnics, sports events, etc.

7. Increased family togetherness and solidarity become evident. Older members (children) of family care for the young ones. Family members show willingness to volunteer to work without expecting something in return.

8. Greater capacity to tolerate one another is evident.

9. Everyone is working to develop one or several specific "talents" Examples: Lupe is working on her singing; Kolo is working on his basketball; Tilila is working on her basketball, too; Laurie is working on volleyball.

10. Thus, the challenge of parenting and raising a family is exciting, fun, and rewarding. It becomes an opportunity to witness gradual and steady growth by noting small changes almost daily.

11. Having no television at home allows the father of the family to spend time interacting with family members rather than just observing passively. Furthermore, the family unselfishly shares their Dad with the "community" through the services he renders freely.

A Final Word

This presentation is perhaps better characterized as a plea to all Tongan Americans to take on the challenge^{of} preparation intellectually, socially, and spiritually to complete the "unfinished business" on your agenda so that you become qualified and eligible to become citizens of a world that is fast becoming one global village.

Yes, the going will get tough and many difficulties and obstacles must be overcome. But please note that where there are great obstacles, there are great rewards; and where there are great rewards, there are great expectations; and where there are great expectations, there are great responsibilities; and where there are great responsibilities, there must be a people great in faith and hope to carry these responsibilities and fulfill the dreams of their forebears.¹⁷ The writer believes that that people is you!

NOTES

1. Recorded in the Personal History of Mr. Samuela Fakatou, given to Dr. 'Inoke F. Fumaki in August 1979, Lale, Hawaii. Mr. Fakatou was one of the recipients of the Liahona Alumni Distinguished Service Award, 1979.
2. "A Nation at Risk," a 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education to the Secretary of Education, p. 3.
3. "A Nation at Risk," p. 4.
4. "International Perspectives on Student Achievement," Psychology Update, Spring 1984, p. 5.
5. As cited in "International Perspectives on Student Achievement," p. 7.
6. This was a theme emphasized by an American educator and Church leader during his years of leadership. His name was David O. McKay, founder of Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus (formerly Church College of Hawaii).
7. Adapted from Dr. Blaine R. Porter's presentation in West Germany to the World Congress on International Education in 1983. He spoke on Family and and School Cooperation for Effective Education.
8. Adapted from "On Families and Schools: A Conversation with Urie Bronfenbrenner," by Professor Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University. Educational Leadership, April 1979.
9. Eric Shumway, "Our Tongan Immigrants: A Cultural Profile," a paper presented in October 1983 for the Utah Arts Council at the University of Utah, Utah.
10. Eric Shumway, "Education for World Citizenship," an address delivered at the Tonga College Old Boys Association Centennial Dinner, October 30, 1982, Honolulu, Hawaii.
11. Eric Shumway, "Our Tongan Immigrants: A Cultural Profile."
12. Neil Abercrombie, State Senate, Hawaii, "Education--A Vital Contribution to Growth of any Given Nation, Society, Community...", an address given October 30, 1982 at the Tonga College Old Boys Association Centennial Dinner, Honolulu, Hawaii.
13. Cited in Lorton, John & Lorton, Eveleen. Human Development. Belmont: Brooks/Cole, 1984, p. 208.
14. "Television: A Dilemma for Parents," a report cited in The Developing Person Through the Life Span by Berger, Kathleen Stassen. New York: Worth Publishers, Inc., 1983, p. 264.
15. "Television: A Dilemma for Parents," p. 265.
16. Ibid.
17. Adapted from the introductory remarks of John H. Groberg, President of the Tonga Mission, recorded in Silver Jubilee, Tonga Mission, 1968.